

Of Crossroads and Undercurrents: Ingemar Lindh's Practice of Collective Improvisation and Jerzy Grotowski

In this article Frank Camilleri discusses the historical and professional links between Ingemar Lindh and Jerzy Grotowski, with a specific focus on the nature and implications of their separate work on physical action. Lindh's practice, particularly his research on the 'disinterested act', is read in the context of Grotowski's 'doing' in *Art as Vehicle*. The individual work of the two practitioners on vocal and vibration techniques is seen as integral to their research on physical action. Frank Camilleri is Senior Lecturer in Drama and Theatre Studies at the University of Kent and Artistic Director of Icarus Performance Project (Malta). He served as Academic Coordinator of Theatre Studies at the University of Malta from 2004 to 2008, and in 2007 co-founded Icarus Publishing Enterprise with Odin Teatret and the Grotowski Institute.

THIS ARTICLE deals with Ingemar Lindh's theatre practice. It adopts a comparative perspective that tackles links, overlapping concerns, and differences between Lindh and Jerzy Grotowski, with a specific focus on the nature and implications of their work on physical action. Lindh's practice of collective improvisation, particularly his work on the disinterested act which sought to accomplish action irrespective of the psychological need for it, is read in the light of Grotowski's *doing* in *Art as Vehicle* during his lifetime.¹

The discussion will be informed by the separate investigations of Lindh and Grotowski on voice work and vibration techniques as integral aspects of their research. Since little is known or has been written about Lindh's work, and much has been narrated, discussed, and critiqued about Grotowski's, this article's primary concern is with the former. Grotowski will thus be invoked to place Lindh's practice within a more familiar context.

This comparative approach emerged from my endeavour to account for a number of historical gaps in Lindh's practice where hard information is either sketchy or non-existent. It also emerged from the attempt to reconstruct a few conceptual blind spots in our knowledge of his work. Furthermore,

this approach hopes to shed light on the nature of the undercurrents (implicit or indirect links) which characterized theatre laboratory explorations in the second half of the twentieth century.

Crossroads and Trajectories

The contribution of Swedish theatre maker Ingemar Lindh (1945–97) to twentieth-century theatre involves his research on the principles of collective improvisation as performance.² He situates his professional lineage in what he calls the 'crossroads' between the *via positiva* of the corporeal mime of Étienne Decroux (with whom he studied and then assisted in Paris in 1966–68) and the *via negativa* in the 'poor theatre' of Jerzy Grotowski (with whom he had various collaborative encounters in Holstebro and Wrocław in the late 1960s and the early 1970s).³ From this angle, Lindh occupies a strategic place in the study of laboratory theatre in Europe in providing a possible connection or halfway house between Decroux and Grotowski.⁴

Lindh came upon this crossroads in 1968, when his desire and that of three other students of Decroux (including Yves Lebreton) to visit Grotowski in Poland for some

months in 1969 led to Decroux expelling all four of them from his school.⁵

Lindh and his companions' visit to Grotowski would have rendered impossible any further work on the demonstration-performance that Decroux had been developing with his core group of collaborators. When the French mime participated in a week-long seminar on 'scenic language' with Jacques Lecoq and Dario Fo at Eugenio Barba's Odin Teatret in Holstebro in 1969, it was Lindh who translated from French and Swedish for Decroux.⁶ It was also at this location that Decroux's former students were now based after founding Studio 2 – the first professional mime troupe in Scandinavia.⁷

Decroux tried to salvage the situation by inviting Lindh and two of the others to return to Paris, but they all stuck by Lebreton, whom Decroux refused to take back.⁸ So in a sense Lindh's desire to know more about and experience Grotowski's work in 1969 came at the expense of his professional association with Decroux.

Such crossing of paths was symptomatic of the indirect, implicit cross-fertilization through undercurrents of *via positiva* and *via negativa* roads which continued to characterize and inform Lindh's individual practice.⁹ Considering the pioneering quality of the individuals researching at the time, when even a brief meeting could lead to a minor adjustment that developed into a major insight, the significance of the impact of such encounters is not necessarily proportionate to the duration of contact. One such instance, which involved an exchange between Lindh and Ryszard Cieślak, will be described shortly.

Lindh, Grotowski, and Barba

Lindh left Studio 2 and Holstebro in 1970, and in 1971 he set up the first laboratory theatre in Sweden, the Institutet för Scenkonst (Institute for Scenic Art). This marked the beginning of a research laboratory on the art of the actor that, though influenced by those whom Lindh called 'his Master' (Decroux) and 'the Master' (Grotowski), moved beyond both to announce an

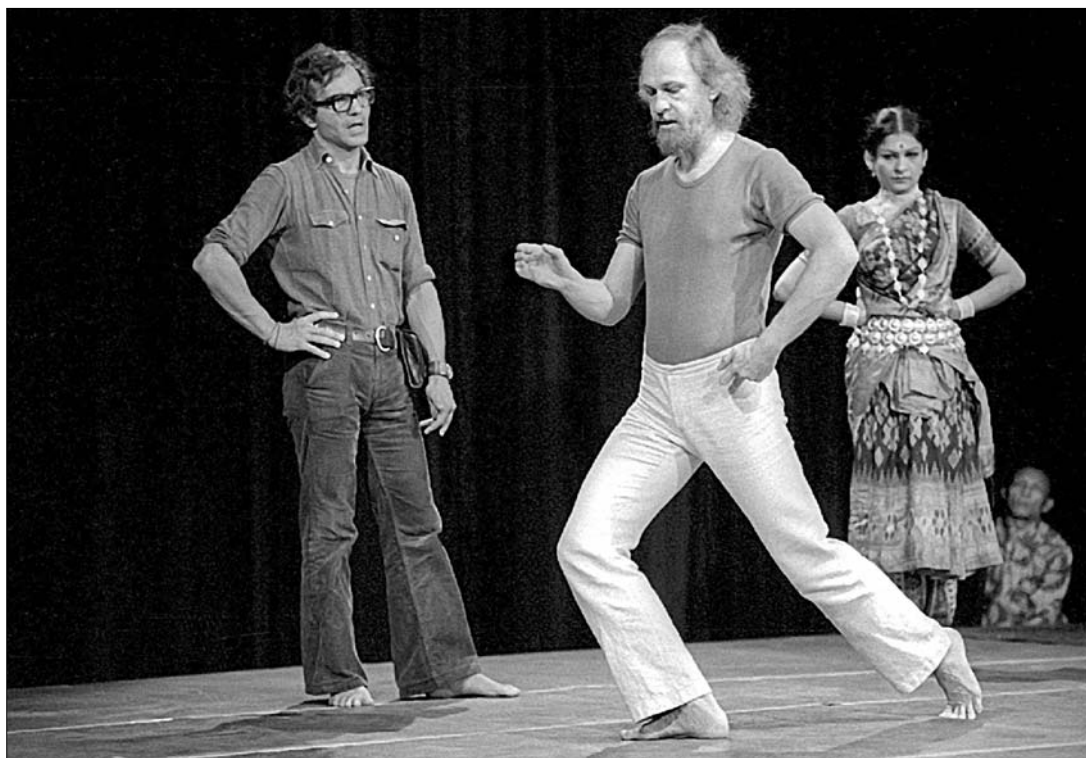
individual path.¹⁰ Lindh's need to set up his own laboratory must have been informed by his various encounters with Grotowski and, especially, with Cieślak with whom he shared a friendship. Factual details about the nature and extent of this collaboration are sketchy, but Magdalena Pietruska, one of Lindh's closest collaborators and current co-director of the Institutet, sheds some light on the matter:

Ingemar met Grotowski in Paris (when Ingemar was still at Decroux's school) and was afterwards collaborating with him in stages, following the work and tours from time to time for a couple of years. So the meeting with Grotowski and the work of his Teatr Laboratorium, as well as the friendship with Ryszard Cieślak, did not consist of, nor was it the result of, a specific working period together; it was more of a dynamic relationship that developed over a number of years with discussions, observation of work, and collaboration in workshops in which Ingemar practised the work of his master Decroux.¹¹

The picture that Pietruska outlines here tallies with the interest in Decroux that Eugenio Barba, one of Grotowski's closest collaborators, had at the time. It was actually through Lindh that Barba got to know about the French mime.¹² Barba continued to pursue his interest in Decroux down the years, inviting Lindh as the first corporeal mime teacher in the early sessions of the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) in Porsgrunn/Stockholm (1980) and Volterra (1981).¹³

If a trajectory were to be drawn linking Decroux and Grotowski, Barba would occupy an important position in it. The strong connection between Barba and Lindh would provide the keystone in an arch that links the two masters. If Lindh embodied the influential crossing of paths of Decroux and Grotowski, Barba was its facilitator. It is through Barba's interest in Decroux and his close collaboration with Grotowski that we can identify another link between Lindh and Grotowski.¹⁴

Lindh's narration of an investigation he once held with Cieślak is indicative of the quality of the collaborative exchanges mentioned by Pietruska.¹⁵ Though it is not pos-



From left to right: Eugenio Barba, Ingemar Lindh, and Sanjukta Panigrahi at the ISTA 1981 session in Volterra.
Photo: Massimo Agus.

sible to ascertain the exact dates and nature of this exchange, Lindh's account of Cieślak's development of the *plastiques walk* that can still be seen in the 1972 film on the training of the Wrocław laboratory, indicates that the encounter happened before that year.¹⁶ Lindh describes how, during this instance, he investigated with Cieślak the possibility of repeating an action *identically*. Lindh worked on a mime sequence derived from Decroux, whereas Cieślak developed his *plastiques walk* which in itself is reminiscent of a mime study.¹⁷

After working on their scores, repeating them over and over again, it became clear that there was something that always 'mutated'.¹⁸ For Lindh, to resist this difference meant to resist something that is alive:

Lindh's recognition, however unformulated it may have been at the beginning of the seventies, announces the drive that was to lead him to resist predetermined structures such as fixed scores, directorial montage, and choreography as principles of organization in the composition and per-

formance of theatre. His research on the principles of collective improvisation may be viewed as the result of his endeavour to give space to the 'mutation' which makes its presence felt in the here and now of occurrence, in theatre as in life.¹⁹

It was this recognition, partly the result of an exchange with Grotowski's main actor at the time, that pushed Lindh to found his own laboratory (Institutet för Scenkonst). Here he could research a performative condition which had not been resolved through the practice of Decroux or, as it turned out, by that of Grotowski. Influenced by both, he developed an individual practice that found expression in collective improvisation as performance within a laboratory-based context. This intersection of influences from Decroux and Grotowski, leading to Lindh's third path, is an example of the undercurrent of connections explored in this article.

The two laboratory processes highlighted in this article share a number of historical, geographical, and biographical similarities. In both, we find the case of non-Italian

practitioners moving to Italy in the mid-1980s to pursue their research practice, the practitioners being no more than seventy-seven miles apart from each other. Lindh's practice with the Institutet in Pontremoli (1984–97) was almost contemporary with Grotowski's Art as Vehicle phase in Pontedera (1986–99). In both cases, the Italian sojourn proved to be their final one, and though Lindh died at the age of fifty-two compared to Grotowski's sixty-five, their then current work could be seen as bringing to a close a long-term important phase (in the case of the former) and a lifelong process (in the case of the latter). The differences between the two are also indicative. By the time that Lindh moved to Pontremoli in 1984, Magdalena Pietruska and Roger Rolin had already been working with him for a number of years. On the other hand, although the Polish master took people with him to Pontedera in 1986, the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski marked a new chapter.

Historically speaking, though Lindh's work with Rolin on the disinterested act (which resisted action filtered by psychological mechanisms)²⁰ was contemporaneous with Grotowski and Thomas Richards's work in Art as Vehicle, Lindh had been working with Rolin since 1978.²¹ This was six years before Richards's first contact with Grotowski's work in a two-week workshop with Ryszard Cieślak at Yale University in 1984.²²

This brings me to the issue of influence. The subsequent diffusion and reception of Grotowski's work places it in a primary position and can lead to the perception that Lindh was following in the footsteps of the former, but this influence is not so clear cut. Like other practitioners at the time, Lindh was aware of and influenced by the revolution that Grotowski brought about in the 1960s and 1970s, first with 'poor theatre' and then with paratheatre, but the contemporaneous occurrence and parallel development of the work during the Italian period of both practitioners is more difficult to map.

At the time of Lindh and Rolin's work on the disinterested act in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Grotowski's research on Art as Vehicle in Pontedera was shrouded in mys-

tery, since few were aware of the nature of his research and even fewer had seen its practice. Answering a question I posed on the matter of influence, Rolin commented that: 'We never had contact with the work of Grotowski at the time. We knew of course that he was in Pontedera but we never tried to be in contact.'²³ The statement confirms that there was no direct link between Lindh and Grotowski during their Italian period. And yet they inhabited the same milieu and operated in a context of shared contacts.

The Italian Connections

The extent of connections shared by research theatre practitioners in Italy at the time is made evident by the fact that the official premiere of *Popolo* (1992–7), Rolin's solo performance that emerged from the work on the disinterested act,²⁴ took place in Pontedera in a festival organized by the *Centro per La Sperimentazione e la Ricerca Teatrale* (Centre for Theatre Experimentation and Research), the same organization which had been hosting the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski since 1986.²⁵ Another instance of the overlapping contexts of the Pontremoli and Pontedera practices concerns one of the main photographers of the Institutet, Maurizio Buscarino, who had photographed *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* in 1979 and is also credited for the 1994 photographs of Grotowski and Richards on the cover of the latter's *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions* (1995).²⁶ Although these historical details hardly amount to evidence of a link between Lindh's and Grotowski's work, they are symptomatic of a milieu that fed and was fed by a network of practices and contacts that operated, however isolated and insulated, in a shared time and geographical context.

In 1996, the theatre group from Malta I was working with at the time (Groups for Human Encounter, directed by John Schranz) was invited for a two-day work exchange in Pontedera with the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards (as it was renamed that year). I remember the interest with which Richards and Mario Biagini asked about what we were up to in Malta,



Ingemar Lindh during an intercultural improvisation at the ISTA 1981 session in Volterra. Photo: Massimo Agus.

especially since Schranz had recently set up a research programme at the University of Malta with Lindh and a group of neuroscientists to investigate human creativity and mental precision (a touchstone in the Institutet's work).²⁷

Although this was never spelled out, even by Grotowski during our conversation with him, we had the impression that we were invited to Pontedera (at least in part) due to our connection with Lindh and the esteem in which his work was held. Again, although this episode does not amount to much, it confirms the supposition that despite a lack of direct contact between the Pontremoli and Pontedera practices, each was aware of the main strands and major developments in the other's research. In the final years of the century, before the advent of websites and predominant internet usage took diffusion of knowledge to another dimension, the shared milieu and interests of the Institutet and the Workcenter served as some kind of deep-water conduit linking them together, even if this involved minimal ideas about what others in the field were doing at the time.

The historical backdrop to this article thus consists of two laboratory practices, isolated

from the main circuit of festivals and from each other but operating in the same period and in bases not more than seventy-seven miles apart, both working on a specific habitation and quality of action that, although different in exploration and outcome, shared a research vision that included work on the voice and on the vibrational qualities of the human body.

Grotowski's work on Afro-Caribbean vibratory songs linked to ritual traditions, and the crucial place it occupied in the habitation of action marked by 'doing' in *Art as Vehicle*, is well known and documented.²⁸ Lindh's investigation of the phenomenon marked by the disinterested act also coincided with specific work on the voice that was related to vibration techniques, mainly as inspired by contact with the therapeutic practice of Baba Bedi (1909–93), which will be discussed in more detail later on.

Due to Lindh's relative lack of bibliographical visibility, it is important now to shed some light on these aspects of his practice and, where appropriate, to compare and contrast them with Grotowski's in order to place the former's contribution within the more recognizable context of the latter. In

this way this article provides some initial clues regarding the possibility of these historical, geographical, and research laboratory similarities sharing deeper and indirect connections.

Mental Precision

Lindh's research on the disinterested act and its implications for action and intention in the performer's work recalls Grotowski's investigations in *Art as Vehicle*. Before discussing the disinterested act in any detail, it is essential to give an account of the context from which it emerged.

The keystone in Lindh's research on the principles of collective improvisation, which eschewed fixed scores of physical action and which he considered to be the quality that distinguished his research from Decroux and Grotowski, concerned 'mental precision' or 'mental action', by which he meant the quality of the movement of the mind that precedes the physical manifestation of action.²⁹ Such precision did not require or result in fixed or predetermined or montaged sequences of physical action. Mental precision in the Institutet's context does not imply a predominance of mind over body. The status of action-in-the-mind implied by 'mental precision' is indeed that of physical action.

In Lindh's research, mental precision is related to 'intention', which, in the Institutet's vocabulary, is a composite of 'to tend toward' (to project and place oneself in the direction of) and 'tension' (to mobilize one's energy in a specific direction). Intention thus understood refers to the movement of the mind at the beginning of every act and indicates an act's mental direction, which can be concretized both through stillness (non-movement) and movement.

This recalls Grotowski's view of intention when, in his 1986 conference in Liège, he linked the inside/outside quality of impulses:

In/tension – intention. There is no intention if there is not a proper muscular mobilization. This is also part of the intention. The intention exists even at a muscular level in the body, and is linked to some objective outside you. . . . Intentions are related to physical memories, to associations, to

wishes, to contact with the others, but *also* to muscular in/tensions.³⁰

A clue to the difference between Lindh's and Grotowski's positions can be found in the latter's reference to intentions being related to 'physical memories, to associations'. In an early text, the *Skara Speech* from 1966, Grotowski gives an account of what he understands by associations:

I have spoken much about personal associations, but these associations are not thoughts. They cannot be calculated. Now I make a movement with my hand, then I look for associations. What associations? Perhaps the association that I am touching someone, but this is merely a thought. What is an association in our profession? It is something that springs not only from the mind but also from the body. It is a return towards a precise memory. Do not analyze this intellectually. Memories are always physical reactions. It is our skin which has not forgotten, our eyes which have not forgotten. What we have heard can still resound within us. It is to perform a concrete act, not a movement such as caressing in general but, for example, stroking a cat. Not an abstract cat but a cat which I have seen, with which I have contact. A cat with a specific name – Napoleon, if you like. And it is this particular cat you now caress. These are associations.³¹

Associations were a central point throughout Grotowski's professional work and can be traced from the 'poor theatre' of the 1960s (with which Lindh was familiar) to *Art as Vehicle*.³² Though Lindh accepted the premise and importance of 'physical memories' and 'associations', in the sense that they were not something to be resisted in his investigations, he did not privilege them at the expense of association-free movements. Lindh asserts that in a context of mental precision 'empty gestures' do not exist:

A gesture could initially seem 'empty', but it is not so. Emptiness does not exist. A gesture can be more or less clear and eloquent, or one can be more or less aware of it, but deep down there is always a meaning which can be rediscovered. As long as one does not fall into the trap of being abstruse or bizarre, it is only a matter of evaluation: Is it something we want? Is it interesting for our present work? Is the sense too hidden or too esoteric? Is it only an actor 'play-acting'? The situation is constantly changing, and then it can happen that one unexpectedly accomplishes a

gesture or an action which one had already accomplished countless times before but which now has a resonance, a consequence in the actor and his colleagues. This is the moment when a sense is found and the actor's actions merge with his mental themes.³³

It is difficult to find a major difference between the objectives of Lindh and Grotowski (both aimed at generating concrete acts), but the paths they adopted to reach their objectives are slightly but crucially different. Grotowski makes links between intentions and associations, where the 'meaning' that can appear or is rediscovered in 'empty' gestures can be a physical memory. His links are not rejected or resisted in Lindh's work – but are seen as only *one* possible option available to the actor trained in mental precision. Such training by the Institutet included, for example, the isometric exercises for actors they developed in the late 1970s.³⁴

The isometric approach involved the isolation of the instant immediately preceding the most dynamic moment of a specific action. Later, the focus shifted to stops at any point in mid-action, which are then completed *without having to generate a new impulse*. In these cases, it is necessary to retain intensity in the stillness in order to ensure that the continuation of a particular action is not a new beginning. In the stops thus generated, the action must be 'continued mentally'.³⁵

The Disinterested Act

The continuation announced by an isometric stop in the shift of intention from a physical to a mental plane functioned as a constitutive element of the Institute's work on *intentions*, which in turn marked an integral aspect of mental precision. In such a context, 'physical memories' and 'associations', albeit important, are only *one* aspect of what Lindh understood by mental precision and action. It is from within this framework that Lindh developed his research on the disinterested act in Pontremoli in the late 1980s.

The disinterested act pushes the limits of the work on mental precision by attempting

to accomplish action irrespective of the psychological need for it.³⁶ The objective of this technical aspiration is to tap into a form of awareness that is perceptible on a more profound level than that filtered by psychological mechanisms (for example, desire, need, and motivation).

One way to understand the basis of the disinterested act is through the active-passivity/passive-activity coordinates that mark Lindh's work on 'active immobility'.³⁷ Just as the disinterested act seeks to effect action without a psychological mechanism that hinders its flow, active immobility seeks (internal) motion irrespective of (external) movement. This specific element of the actor's habitation of action is perceptible on an organic level and can only be described in terms of dynamics and textures.

Rolin's performance in *Popolo* was made up of sequences of actions, all linked by a constant flow of energy, but the actions themselves were characterized by what I term a sense of 'an action that is withheld'. The actor was performing a 'holding back' that was, paradoxically (that is, 'irrespective of the psychological need'), propelling him forward. It was as if Rolin's source of energy derived from the retention of that same energy.

It is possible to trace the technical genealogy of this phenomenon to the Institutet's work on Decroux's mime, Tai Chi, and empirical modes of training, but the concept marked by the disinterested act and its manifestation in performance is unique to the research of the Institutet.³⁸ Pietruska notes November 1990 as the beginning of the work on *Popolo*, and adds that:

The research on the *disinterested* act is a further development and a new aspect of the work on *sense* and *signification*. The text of a sutra in archaic Japanese is chosen as the starting point for work *with* and *for* the voice. This is also the first time Lindh tests vibrational techniques in the work of the actor.³⁹

The intersection that the disinterested act shares with voice work and vibration techniques recalls the vibratory songs at the heart of the *doer's* work in Art as Vehicle. The significant point about this similarity, how-

ever superficial or otherwise it may be, is not that the work of Lindh and Grotowski was identical or related, but rather that their research investigations led them both to investigate specific ways of inhabiting physical action by means of voice and vibration techniques.

The Non-Manifested Act

An important aspect of the phenomenon marked by the disinterested act concerns Pietruska's research with Lindh on the non-manifested act, which emerged during her work (1995–7) on her solo performance *Saffo*.⁴⁰ It is a work on the habitation of action that resists the actor's impulse to show and, as such, is related to the disinterested act in seeking to perform an act irrespective of a need, in this case the vanity to demonstrate.⁴¹ The research premise that underpins this work highlights a central paradox at the core of the actor's work: if an actor is an 'actor' when she is acting, does she have to *show* that she is acting in order to *be* an 'actor'?

Lindh and Pietruska's attempt to answer this question instigated the work on acts whose mechanisms (psychological, technical, or otherwise) are not made explicitly manifest. Lindh liked to use the image of the Chinese juggler washing dishes to exemplify the point about the non-manifested act: the juggler's skill is so ingrained that it becomes part of her 'essence' to such an extent that she does not need to show it, even though it is still possible to perceive her skill (as a juggler) in the daily action of washing dishes.

The specific context from which the non-manifested act emerged – that is, the work on *Saffo* – was also influential. The poetic and fragmentary quality of Sappho's texts on which Pietruska and Lindh were working conditioned the concept of a 'poem-performance' that is not geared at a logical and linear narrative, but rather at 'being poetry'.

The question of *being* thus influenced Pietruska's habitation of actions: 'nothing' (theatrical) should happen except what is happening in the here and now. This was a

consideration that linked *being* (including scenic presence) and invisible virtuosity.

Viewed from a specific angle, this aspect of Lindh's work on acts recalls Grotowski's endeavour in Art as Vehicle to tap into a mode that, though based on laboratory process and precise technique, aspires to go beyond it, to 'a level of energy more subtle'.⁴²

The non-manifested act in particular, with its resistance to the actor's impulse to show in favour of the actor's *being* in the act, is reminiscent of the distinction that Grotowski draws between 'acting' and *doing*.⁴³ More pertinent to our discussion is the active-passivity dynamic that underlines the disinterested act and which, as has already been noted, recalls Decroux's active immobility.⁴⁴ The dynamic is also strongly reminiscent of a fundamental aspect of Grotowski's 'poor theatre' from the mid-1960s: 'The requisite state of mind [in *via negativa*] is a passive readiness to realize an active role, a state in which one does not *want to do that* but rather *resigns from not doing it*'.⁴⁵

Lindh was, of course, familiar with Grotowski's flag-bearing article 'Towards a Poor Theatre', and it must have influenced his practice in a direct manner. However, Grotowski and Lindh's pursuit of this related phenomenon took different paths. Grotowski developed his research away from theatre in favour of other models (first paratheatre and then Art as Vehicle), thus opening new dimensions of performance; Lindh stayed within the domain of theatre and tried to push it to an extreme by attempting to change the actor's attitude, insisting on mental precision and improvisation-as-performance.

It can be argued, correctly, that Grotowski's work in Art as Vehicle is traceable back to his earlier phases, especially Objective Drama (1983–6) and also Theatre of Sources (1976–82).⁴⁶ However, rather than a divergence, this marks another parallel with Lindh's laboratory research. Rolin confirms that though the phrase 'disinterested act' was first used by Lindh in November 1990 at the start of the work on *Popolo*, the process of crystallization that led to it could be traced to the nomadic period of the Institutet in France in 1979.⁴⁷

It is correct to say that the 'disinterested act' was always present in our work but at a certain point we needed to be more consequent with it in order to be able to distinguish it – and this work was one of the foci in *Popolo*.⁴⁸

Such a long-term process of crystallization is in line with Lindh's views on 'research', which is also more long-term and retrospective, as distinct from 'artistic searching', which is more immediate and forward-looking.⁴⁹

The point here is that the research in Pontremoli and Pontedera in the late 1980s and early 1990s went through a process of crystallization that dates back at least to the 1970s. This can actually be pushed even further to the late 1960s, when the young Swedish mime came in contact with the Polish director. But already at this initial point, though inspired and influenced by Grotowski, Lindh had a sense of something that would take him beyond that inspiration. Answering a conference panel question on motivation and intention in the disinterested act (hence the colloquial syntax of the transcript), Lindh prefers to 'go back' in time:

When I worked with Grotowski, he was always speaking of the impulse. I said: no, there is something wrong in the word impulse. Because it is related to the act, and if you do not jump over the table immediately and there was a hesitation, everything happened: the censorship, the fear. Everything happens between the impulse and the doing. And it was that which Grotowski tried to eliminate. But if you work only in that way, you are slave of time. Because you had to jump. If there were no manifestation of your impulse, it was not valid. So time and space were in a way imprisoning the actor. So I said: no, the intention can be independent and suspended in time. The intention is already there. I sit here, I have the intention to stand up, but I am not doing it yet. But everything has been modified. So we started to use the word intention and now all our work is based on it, the fundamental thing is to find the intention. But the intention has nothing to do with thinking, it is quicker than the brain.⁵⁰

This quotation is indicative both of the extent of Grotowski's influence on Lindh and of the subtle but important difference between the two. The implications for physical action of a focus on mental precision are revealing.

Lindh sought to obtain physical precision in the actor's work not by focusing directly on its external aspects by means of codified and formalized technique (which it was in his capacity to do after his apprenticeship and collaboration with Decroux). Neither did he seek it within the framework of physical memories and associations within precise and repeatable structures. Rather, physical precision in the Institutet's laboratory was achieved almost as a *side-effect of the mental precision obtained from work on intentions*. The disinterested act in Pontremoli at the turn of the 1990s was one major aspect of this work.

Encounter with Baba Bedi

Lindh's work on the disinterested act coincided with a vocal laboratory process informed by vibration technique. However, his encounter with vibration techniques did not come via Grotowski's work with Maud Robart and Jean-Claude (Tiga) Garoute on Haitian ritual songs and practices.⁵¹ It came by chance through an encounter with Baba Bedi's therapeutic practice in 1991 after the latter was recommended to Lindh, who was suffering from a serious illness at the time. Since little, if anything at all, has been written in English on Baba Bedi and his practice, I will provide an outline here to highlight the context that influenced Lindh's research on the vibrational qualities of the voice.

Baba Pyare Lal Bedi (1909–93), also known as Baba Bedi XVI, was an Indian prince believed to be the sixteenth descendant of Sat Guru Baba Nanak (1469–1539), founder of Sikhism. He studied at the Universities of Oxford, Heidelberg, and Geneva, and occupied for a time a research post at the University of Berlin. He also had a long research collaboration with Albert Einstein. In India, he was actively involved in the liberation movement (which led to his spending some time in British prisons) and was a member of the Marxist Communist Party of India.

After India gained Independence in 1947, he occupied various official posts until 1953, when he answered a spiritual calling. It was at this time that he developed an interest in esoteric sources and the self-healing capacity

of the human being based on the 'free passage of light'. In 1955 he founded the Research Institute of the Unknown in New Delhi, and in 1972 he moved to Italy where he started diffusing his vibration therapy and dedicated himself to the holistic development of the human being through 'psychic sensibility'.

Baba Bedi's activity in Italy led to the formation of various centres, including the Centre of Esoteric Studies and the Centre of Aquarian Philosophy in Milan, where Lindh came in contact with him in the early 1990s. After following therapeutic sessions with Baba Bedi, Lindh (and later Rolin) participated in a series of courses that Baba Bedi gave in different steps and degrees of vibration techniques.

The line that runs through Baba Bedi's colourful life is a concern with the improvement of human experience, hence his early scientific and political endeavours, and his later spiritual ones aimed at increasing self-harmony through an enhanced capacity of perception and sensibility.

According to Baba Bedi, the latter is achievable through the elimination of blocks of energy (dark points) that facilitate the free passage of light. Self-healing is one aspect of this practice. Another aspect concerns the enhancement of individual creative talents in an artistic context (writing, dance, and so on). Baba Bedi's practice with the voice that the Institutet were interested in was not strictly therapeutic, but an important element of his work on talents and capacities.

Pietruska comments that Lindh's fortuitous encounter with Baba Bedi became important for their theatre work 'mostly because we found from such a different and unexpected source a confirmation . . . for some intuitions or things we had already experienced on a working level, specifically with voice work'.⁵² In other words, the ability to perceive that accrued from the encounter with Baba Bedi made it possible for the Institutet first to *recognize* what they were already doing on an intuitive level, and second to thus *develop* their vocal process. The following section provides indications of Lindh's exploration of the vibratory qualities

of the voice. This discussion is preceded by an outline of Grotowski's research in the same field by way of a contextual point of reference.

Vibration Voice Work

In 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle' (1995), Grotowski speaks about the 'vibratory qualities' of 'the ritual songs of the ancient tradition'.⁵³ Though he knows better than to define these qualities, Grotowski provides some indications about their nature. In essence, these qualities are a 'sonority' that has a tangible impact on what is being sung: 'they become the meaning of the song'.⁵⁴ This implies that it is the manner (texture, quality) rather than the matter (verbal meaning, melody) of the song that is crucial to their generation. So it is not a question of learning a specific text or a melody, but of finding the conditions of possibility for such sonar resonance to occur. According to Grotowski, the ancient songs of tradition are one such instrument which engage the singer totally, to such an extent that the 'song begins to *sing us*'.⁵⁵ It is through such total engagement that Grotowski links vocal vibratory qualities to impulses:

In the work which interests me . . . the traditional songs (like those of the Afro-Caribbean line) are rooted in organicity. It's always the song-body, it's never the song dissociated from the impulses of life that run through the body; in the song of tradition, *it is no longer a question of the position of the body or the manipulation of the breath, but of the impulses and the little actions*. Because the impulses which run in the body are exactly those which carry the song.⁵⁶

The italicized text in this quotation has important implications for a comparison between Lindh's and Grotowski's work on the vibration qualities of the voice. It marks a potential overlap of concerns, but the path Lindh followed to pursue vocal vibration was different from Grotowski's. Though the Institutet did not work on songs of tradition, by the time they moved to Pontremoli in 1986 they had done at least a decade of vocal work aimed at exploring vocal textures and

qualities that coincided with a physical resonance. Much of this work was intuitive, but it was a practice they pursued as a professional ensemble. Lindh's encounter with Baba Bedi in 1991 helped the Institutet to articulate what they had been investigating, even though their exploration remained intuitive compared to Grotowski's more systematic work on songs in *Art as Vehicle*.

As early as 1976–78, during the first years of their nomadic period, the Institutet distinguished between work *for* the voice and work *with* the voice. 'Work *for* the voice' refers to the exploration of the voice as an instrument for the sake of investigating and enhancing one's vocal possibilities. This kind of work is not related to an artistic outcome. 'Work *with* the voice' refers to what can be done with one's vocal instrument as a tool aimed at generating performance material and at achieving an artistic result. This clarification, simple as it might seem in theory, had important repercussions in the practice.

In 1979, in Lausanne (France), the Institutet developed work on the *linear voice*.⁵⁷ Still during their nomadic period, in Vaudreuil Ville Nouvelle (France, 1979–80), they developed a work on vocal textures and qualities called *sound forest*, which Pietruska describes as having

two aspects: an explorative exercise *for the voice* and, at the same time, an exercise in listening and dynamo-rhythmical collaboration – that is, work *with the voice*. This is further developed in *collective improvisations* on the vocal themes of the performance.⁵⁸

It was this kind of approach to voice training that allowed Lindh to explore the voice on an intuitive level – an approach that was also informed by the laboratory processes he had come in contact with, including Grotowski's in the late 1960s, as well as Eugenio Barba's, whose 1972 film displays work with which Lindh was familiar.⁵⁹ It is mostly in the exploration of *working for the voice* (that is, to enhance vocal possibilities) that the Institutet's vocal practice was made clearer after the encounter with Baba Bedi. Rolin admits that the nature and qualities of the work crystallized by Baba Bedi are:

extremely difficult to put into examples, or to clarify through verbalizing or writing, since the qualities obtained from vibration technique are particular and general at the same time and always in a constant movement, and yet [they serve to] concretize . . . work on awareness and consciousness and as such focus your acts in relation to both inner and outer space. A type of listening that later on is not in contradiction with a work addressed to an artistic expression but instead [becomes] one more tool that helps the actor being focused on the acting [rather than] on the outcome.⁶⁰

It is clear that the vibration techniques referred to here are not simply externally oriented phenomena but, rather, are related to a form of awareness that combines inner and outer action, which is then manifested and recognizable in the quality of the vocal output. Vibration voice work of this kind has a life of its own that resists application to theatre exigencies such as vocal control and manipulation. In this respect, Lindh comes close to Grotowski in not trying to appropriate such work as a technique for theatre but, rather, as work upon oneself.⁶¹

Activating the Voice

Despite the problematic nature of describing this work in any technical detail, it might be possible to give some indications of what it entails.⁶² Rolin explains how according to Baba Bedi you have to be 'activated' (by someone who is already so) to practise vibration technique.⁶³ Activation is not some kind of warm-up that is done before every session, but rather is a case of 'once activated, always activated'. It generally takes about eight sessions to activate the voice. Pietruska elaborates on the process:

We usually do it [the 'activation'] individually. The person becomes 'activated' and remains passively-active, allowing the voice, in whatever forms it takes, to make its journey. The voice is free to make passages, changes, variations from low to high, from whispering to crying, changing 'colour', volume etc. Usually, it seems that the voice starts by 'working on' the points where the individual has some problems or blocks, almost like some kind of internal 'massage'. The voice gets the 'vibrational' quality when it is completely free; you recognize it immediately and it is then very

difficult (for the observer) to hear from where it is coming.⁶⁴

Certain elements of the practice are used in workshop situations, but they are never verbalized as 'technique'; they are, rather, presented as a 'free work on the voice' that might, potentially, trigger something in participants without pre-empting an objective or outcome.

Rolin and Pietruska acknowledge the fact that they did not investigate these techniques in great depth on their own merits as a therapeutic practice, but only insofar as they informed their theatre practice.⁶⁵ And Pietruska highlights a specific instance of this influence, in the process indicating a paradoxical link with and divergence from the vibration work in *Art as Vehicle*, when she refers to the relationship between body movement and voice:

The body is free to move, but it is very clear that *the movement of the body is not connected to the emission of the voice. It makes its own 'travel', independent from but not in contradiction with the movement of the body.* This point was very interesting to us. It was a confirmation of what we already experienced in the work on immobility and intention as a common source for the body and the voice, which means that the specific positions of the body or a muscular tension as a support for the voice has nothing (or very little) to do with the voice.⁶⁶

Though, as quoted earlier, Grotowski maintains that, 'in the song of tradition, it is no longer a question of the position of the body or the manipulation of the breath, but of the impulses and the little actions', his work did lead him to explore certain body positions and movement structures in conjunction with vocal work and vibratory songs.⁶⁷ The work on *yanvalou*, for example, initiated during the Objective Drama phase and then developed in *Art as Vehicle*, is a good example of how songs and movement structures were brought together.⁶⁸ Furthermore, in addition to the songs of tradition, Grotowski mentions 'the forms of movement' (along with 'the text as living word' and 'the logic of the smallest actions') as a key area of investigation in *Art as Vehicle*⁶⁹ – the implication

being that somehow or somewhere these forms of movement are related to the songs.

However, Grotowski was not interested in certain body positions because they magically (intrinsically) generate vibratory qualities, but rather because the impulses required for these positions and movements are the same as those necessary to generate vibratory qualities. This, I feel, is an important distinction.

From this perspective, Lindh's work is reminiscent of Grotowski's except for the crucial omission of a focus on traditional songs and their accompanying forms of movement.

This specific similarity/divergence between Lindh and 'the Master' is representative of the overall relationship between these two theatre laboratory practitioners at the end of the twentieth century. On one level, it indicates Grotowski's more sophisticated and systematic approach as much as it highlights the Institutet's more intuitive (and thus more analytically problematic) practice. On another level, it reflects Lindh's consistency in resisting predetermined and predetermining structures (including songs and forms of movement), *not* because they are ineffective or counterproductive, but because his specific research, which found its artistic and theatrical expression in collective improvisation as performance, demanded it from him. Lindh was also fully aware that he would simply be repeating what he acquired from his masters if he pursued the avenues which they were already investigating. It was essential that he developed his way:

I was quite fortunate ending up being this kind of crossroad[s] between the two greatest theatre masters in the second half of this century. . . . It was a very strange crossroad[s], to have been working with Decroux, and then later with Grotowski. It was also a crossroad[s] of principles. . . . [Now] I do not want to do the theatre of Decroux, I do not want to do the theatre of Grotowski. But that is where my starting point is. Now I move forward.⁷⁰

Notes and References

1. The disinterested act will be discussed in detail later in the article.

2. For a comprehensive introduction to Lindh, including his principal research concerns and the main phases of his work, see Frank Camilleri, 'Collective

Improvisation: the Practice and Vision of Ingemar Lindh', *TDR*, LII, No. 4 (2008), p. 82–97.

3. Ingemar Lindh, "'Gathering Around the Word Theatre . . .'", in Pentti Paavola and Anu Alakorpela, ed., *Knowledge is a Matter of Doing* (Helsinki: Acta Scenica, 1995), p. 66.

4. I discuss this point further in my 'Introduction to the English Edition', in Ingemar Lindh, *Stepping Stones* (Holstebro, Malta, Wrocław: Icarus, 2010), p. xvi–xvii.

5. Marco De Marinis, *Mimo e Teatro nel Novecento* (Florence: La Casa Usher, 1993), p. 128–9.

6. Eugenio Barba, 'The Hidden Master', in Thomas Leabhart and Franc Chamberlain, ed., *The Decroux Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 29.

7. Ian Watson, *Towards a Third Theatre: Eugenio Barba and the Odin Teatret* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 6.

8. De Marinis, *Mimo e Teatro*, op. cit., p. 129. Despite this situation, Lindh kept assisting Decroux from time to time in workshops and conferences until 1970, the 1969 event in Holstebro being one such instance.

9. Cf. Alison Hodge, who writes about the complexity of the cross-fertilization of ideas and practices between theatre practitioners in the second half of the twentieth century in *Actor Training*, second edn (London: Routledge, 2010), p. xxiii–xxiv.

10. Magdalena Pietruska, in correspondence with the author, 20 March 2008.

11. Magdalena Pietruska, in correspondence with the author, 30 January 2007.

12. 'It was Ingemar Lindh, a young Swede who had attended the mime classes Decroux taught in his own Paris home, who first told me about him. Ingemar illustrated the basic principles of the work done there and demonstrated some of the exercises he had learned. He told me many anecdotes revealing his master's personality' (Barba, 'The Hidden Master', op. cit., p. 28–9).

13. Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese, ed., *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: the Secret Art of the Performer*, second edn (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 313. This book also features three sets of photographs by Savarese which depict Lindh demonstrating exercises taken from Decroux (p. 94–5, 204–5). Barba continued, and still continues, to pursue his interest in Decroux with the participation of another former student and assistant, Thomas Leabhart, during ISTA sessions.

14. Torgeir Wethal's Odin Teatret films from this period – e.g., Yves Lebreton's *Corporal Mime* (1971), *Training at the Teatr Laboratorium in Wrocław* (1972), and *Physical Training at Odin Teatret* (1972) – reflect the cross-fertilization and exchanges that existed at the time between Decroux's former assistants and the laboratories of Barba and Grotowski.

15. Frank Camilleri, notes from a conversation with Ingemar Lindh, 1997. I discuss Lindh's exchange with Cieślak in "'To Push the Actor Training to Its Extreme": Training Process in Ingemar Lindh's Practice of Collective Improvisation', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, XVIII, No. 4 (2008), p. 427.

16. Torgeir Wethal, dir., *Training at the Teatr Laboratorium in Wrocław* (Holstebro: Odin Teatret Film, 1972).

17. This walk recalls Marcel Marceau's famous 'Walking Against the Wind' routine, which he used from the 1940s through the 1980s, where he pretends to be pushed backwards by a gust of wind. Marceau was, of course, a former student of Decroux.

18. See also Lindh, 'Gathering Around the Word Theatre', op. cit., p. 67–8, where he hints at this exchange with Cieślak.

19. Camilleri, 'To Push the Actor Training', op. cit., p. 427.

20. The disinterested act will be discussed in detail later on. See also Frank Camilleri, 'Hospitality and the Ethics of Improvisation in the Work of Ingemar Lindh', *New Theatre Quarterly*, XXVI, No. 4 (2008), p. 257–8.

21. Magdalena Pietruska, 'Institutet för Scenkonst: a Chronology', in Ingemar Lindh, *Stepping Stones* (Holstebro, Malta, Wrocław: Icarus, 2010), p. 135.

22. Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 9.

23. Roger Rolin, in correspondence with the author, 1 November 2007.

24. A work-in-progress demonstration version, *Popolo on the Road*, was presented in Italy, Germany, Sweden, and Norway in 1991.

25. In 1999 it changed its name to Fondazione Pontedera Teatrale (Pontedera Theatre Foundation).

26. The cover of Lindh's *Stepping Stones* (and of the Italian and Swedish editions, 1998 and 2003 respectively) consists of a photograph of Pietruska by Buscarino. The book also contains five full-page photographs by Buscarino at the beginning of each chapter. See also Antonio Attisani and Maurizio Buscarino's photo-article, 'Al Teatro di Pontremoli la Svezia Vicina', *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, XLIX (1987), p. 102–11.

27. For details about this research programme, see Lindh, *Stepping Stones*, op. cit., p. 180 ff. Mental precision in Lindh's work will be discussed later.

28. See, for example, Jerzy Grotowski, 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle', in Richards, *At Work with Grotowski*, op. cit., p. 121–32; Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford, ed., *The Grotowski Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 367–494; James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta, *Jerzy Grotowski* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 52–3, 116–18.

29. I discuss mental precision in Lindh's work in various instances elsewhere. See, especially, 'To Push the Actor Training', op. cit., p. 430–1; 'Hospitality and the Ethics of Improvisation', op. cit., p. 251; and my 'Glossary of Terms' in Lindh, *Stepping Stones*, op. cit., p. 220–1.

30. Richards, *At Work with Grotowski*, op. cit., p. 96 (emphasis in the original).

31. Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1968]), p. 185–6.

32. Richards makes constant reference to working with associations in a way that recalls the Skara speech description. See, for example, Richards, *At Work with Grotowski*, op. cit., p. 58, 64, 66.

33. Lindh, *Stepping Stones*, op. cit., p. 45–6. 'Mental themes' refers to the content of an action or an event (ibid., p. 32–3, 225–6).

34. I discuss the Institutet's isometric-based training for actors in detail in 'To Push the Actor Training', op. cit., p. 435–9.

35. Lindh, *Stepping Stones*, op. cit., p. 25. See also p. 218.

36. For other accounts of the disinterested act, see Lindh, *Stepping Stones*, op. cit., p. 122–3, 214; Camilleri, 'Hospitality and the Ethics of Improvisation', op. cit., p. 257–8; Lindh, 'Gathering Around the Word Theatre', op. cit., passim; and De Marinis, *Mimo e Teatro*, op. cit., p. 289.

37. The active-passivity phenomenon referred to here is related to Lindh's work on 'mobile immobility' or 'active immobility' which he had received from Decroux. This kind of immobility refers to 'a technical and physiological condition in which the practitioner

performs an action even if there is a lack of movement' (Camilleri, 'Hospitality and the Ethics of Improvisation', op. cit., p. 250; 253–4).

38. For a comprehensive account of Lindh's training processes, see Camilleri, 'To Push the Actor Training', op. cit., p. 431–40.

39. Pietruska, 'A Chronology', op. cit., p. 170 (emphasis in the original).

40. Directed by Lindh and based on texts from Sappho, fragments of *Saffo* were presented from as early as 1992.

41. The term 'non-manifested act' was not used by Lindh and Pietruska at the time; it was coined by Pietruska later when she was writing the chronology of the Institutet's activity and the need was felt to differentiate between the main focus in the work on *Popolo* and *Saffo* (Pietruska, 'A Chronology', op. cit., p. 176).

42. Grotowski, 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle', op. cit., p. 125.

43. See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 121–3.

44. See also *The Decroux Sourcebook*, op. cit., p. 156–9: 'mime is movement in place. It's movement within exterior immobility. It's as if man were a shell inside of which things happen that we can sense without being able to see them. . . . It's what I call immobility transported' (p. 156–7).

45. Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, op. cit., p. 17 (emphasis in the original).

46. For an account of these phases see Schechner and Wolford, *Grotowski Sourcebook*, op. cit., p. 205–364. See also Slowiak and Cuesta, *Grotowski*, op. cit., p. 40–52.

47. The Institutet's various periods of work correspond to the different geographical locations of their laboratory base: (1) the early period between 1971 and 1976 saw the Institutet operating in the isolated northern Swedish forests of Storhøgen-Nyby; (2) the nomadic period between 1976 and 1983 corresponds to the time when the Institutet lacked a permanent base and operated mainly in France and Sweden; (3) between 1984 and 1997 the Institutet was based in Pontremoli, Italy; (4) since 1998 the Institutet has been based in Nygård (Sweden) under the co-directorship of Magdalena Pietruska and Roger Rolin. For a detailed chronological account of the Institutet's periods see Pietruska, 'A Chronology', op. cit., p. 125–200. For a concise account, see Camilleri, 'The Practice and Vision of Ingemar Lindh', op. cit., p. 83.

48. Roger Rolin, in correspondence with the author, 1 November 2007.

49. Lindh, 'Gathering Around the Word Theatre', op. cit., p. 60.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 77–8.

51. See Schechner and Wolford, *Grotowski Sourcebook*, op. cit., p. 272.

52. Pietruska, in correspondence with the author, 20 March 2008.

53. Grotowski, 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle', op. cit., p. 126.

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 128 (my emphasis).

57. Linear voice refers to work 'aimed at achieving a starting point for the voice, i.e. to obtain as neutral

("linear") a base as possible. It seeks to overcome the predetermined rhythms of a text and of a language by "flattening" the texture of the voice so that it is no longer predictable and can thus serve as a base for the creation of vocal qualities and patterns for texts used in performance' (Camilleri, 'Glossary of Terms', op. cit., p. 219).

58. Pietruska, 'A Chronology', op. cit., p. 138 (emphasis in the original).

59. Torgeir Wethal, dir., *Vocal Training at Odin Teatret* (Holstebro: Odin Teatret Film, 1972).

60. Rolin, in correspondence with the author, 22 June 2008.

61. Cf. Grotowski, 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle', op. cit., p. 132–3.

62. Cf. Wolford's attempt to give an account of the vibratory qualities in *Action*: 'I have never heard singing like this before. It is begun by Richards, who sings with a fluctuation of vibration so alive, so extreme, that the song becomes in some sense tangibly present in the space. . . . The resonance is spatial, concrete; it strikes my skin in a particular way. There is something . . . almost inhuman about it, not like anything I ever imagined a human voice could do. As if not only words and melody but even the singer himself comes to be *aspirated* by the song. Not that the words or melody are made any less precise – exactly the opposite – but this powerful fluctuation of resonance – physical as well as audible – the living presence of the song, fully unearthed and embodied, is so alien to my perception, so unique, that it is as if I experience *song* for the first time' (Schechner and Wolford, *Grotowski Sourcebook*, op. cit., p. 413, emphasis in the original).

63. Cf. Richards speaking about centres of energy that 'become activated' during the work on subtle energy: 'The syllables and the melody of these songs begin to touch and activate something I perceive to be like energy seats in the organism': Thomas Richards, 'The Edge-Point of Performance, 1995', in *Heart of Practice: Within the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 7.

64. Pietruska, in correspondence with the author, 20 March 2008.

65. Rolin and Pietruska are also aware of the New Age contexts that Baba Bedi subsequently (especially after his death) came to be associated with in Italy. Rolin admits that though he has experienced enough 'practical consequences' to believe in its existence and potential, the Institutet has not been 'taken in' by the esoteric context that surrounds Baba Bedi's therapeutic practice (Roger Rolin, interview with the author, 13 July 2009).

66. Pietruska, in correspondence with the author, 20 March 2008, my emphasis.

67. Grotowski, 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle', op. cit., p. 128.

68. 'The *yanvalou* is a ritual dance with a strong rhythm that incorporates a subtle undulation of the spine and a bending forward from the hips' (Slowiak and Cuesta, *Grotowski*, op. cit., p. 49–50).

69. Grotowski, 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle', op. cit., p. 128.

70. Lindh, 'Gathering Around the Word Theatre', op. cit., p. 59, 66. 68.